

**Protocol  
for  
Incidental Take Authorization**

**Greater Prairie Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido pinnatus*)**

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**Note**

*If carrying out a given protocol is not feasible, or multiple listed species in a given management area pose conflicts, contact the Bureau of Endangered Resources at 608/264-6057. Staff in BER will work with Integrated Science Services (Research) staff, species experts and managers to establish an acceptable protocol for a given site that will allow for incidental take without further legal Consultation or public notice*

**I. Species Background Information**

**A. Status**

**State status:** Threatened

**USFWS Region 3 Species of Management Concern?** No. Not migratory.

**Number of Known Sites in Wisconsin:** Current census of breeding males (1999) is 699 distributed in portions of six central Wisconsin counties: Adams, Portage, Wood, Marathon, Clark, and Taylor.

**Global Range:** Found only in the U.S. Hunttable populations in S. Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Kansas and remnant populations in Minnesota, Missouri, N. Dakota, Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin.

**B. Habitat**

**General Habitat Description:** Minimally, good prairie chicken habitat consists of a large area of open landscape not more than 20-25% wooded with wooded tracts in small, scattered blocks; a minimum of 35% (50% preferred) in permanent grassland; undisturbed

grassland nesting cover, preferably in block at least 80 acres in size and accounting for minimum of 25% of the landscape (undisturbed grassland areas of up to one square mile or more are beneficial as core areas); disturbed grassland or sedge meadow habitat to serve as brood cover; secure tracts of sedge meadow and/or shrub-carr for winter cover; and dependable winter food supply.

**Critical habitat features:** Large areas of undisturbed grassland and open horizons are essential components of prairie chicken habitat. Recently disturbed grassland is preferred by broods. The appropriate habitat mix must be present on a minimum of 18 square miles.

**C. Life History**

The greater prairie chicken is a non-migratory grouse native to the state of Wisconsin. It is a lekking species, meaning that adult males congregate communally in spring on many breeding display grounds scattered throughout the occupied range. These display grounds are referred to as leks, or booming grounds in the case of the prairie chicken. Adult male prairie chickens may spend much of their entire life in close proximity to one of these booming grounds.

Prairie chickens require large expanses of open grassland. Most mating occurs at the lek site, with the peak occurring around April 18 each year. Females typically nest within a one mile radius of the lek. Clutch size is 10 to 12 eggs, and the peak of the hatch in Wisconsin is in early June, after 23 to 25 days of incubation. Hens with broods spend most of their time in suitable grasslands searching for food, primarily insects.

Brood dispersal occurs throughout the fall, winter and early spring, and can account for prairie chicken observations well removed from the occupied range. Juvenile hens exhibit the greatest dispersal movements.

Prairie chickens group together in "packs" of birds for the late fall and winter. Packs are associated with winter feeding sites, and may separate into smaller groupings for night roosting. In central Wisconsin, birds in these packs may number in the dozens, perhaps as many as 200 individuals or more.

## II. Management Protocol For Authorized Incidental Take

If the management activity is for the purpose of recovering, maintaining or improving the grassland, prairie or savanna ecosystem that includes habitat for prairie chickens, then incidental take is allowed if these conditions are followed:

First, the **combined total of annual treatments to undisturbed grassland does not exceed 20%** of the entire area of undisturbed grassland. In addition:

### A. **Burning:**

1. If no monitoring of prairie chickens is occurring: No incidental take is authorized.
2. If monitoring of prairie chickens is occurring:

Spring burning (cool season grasses) is not to occur after April 25 and burn units are not limited in size. Prescribed burning in wetlands (sedge meadows) for the purpose of maintaining the open habitat should occur as early as possible and not later than May 20. Warm season grass burning is limited to 40 contiguous acres or less and should not occur after May 20. Fall burning is permitted after August 1.

### B. **Mowing:**

1. If no monitoring of prairie chickens occurring: No incidental take is allowed.
2. If monitoring of prairie chickens is occurring:

No mowing between April 15 and July 15, except for monotypic forb stands (e.g., Canada goldenrod and stinging nettle) for improvement of grassland quality; grass and grass/legume hay should be mowed after July 15 and preferably before August 1.

### C. **Selective Brush Cutting:**

1. If no monitoring of prairie chickens occurring: No incidental take is allowed.
2. If monitoring of prairie chickens is occurring: No restrictions on brush cutting.

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**D.            Grazing:**

1.        If no monitoring of prairie chickens occurring: No incidental take is permitted.

2.        If monitoring of prairie chickens is occurring:

If the total of annual treatments to undisturbed grassland does not exceed 20% of the entire area of undisturbed grassland, grazing may be conducted on identified grazing units on a rotational schedule AND stocking rate determined by the property wildlife manager.

**E.            Herbicide Use:**

1.        If no monitoring of prairie chickens occurring: No incidental take is permitted.

2.        If monitoring of prairie chickens is occurring:

Herbicide use is allowed at the discretion of the property wildlife manager. Manager should take precautions to avoid chemical drift when applications occur adjacent to potential nesting or brooding sites.

## Survey Protocol

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All personnel must be able to identify male prairie chickens on booming grounds by sight and sound.

Survey period: April 1 through April 25.

Weather conditions: No rain, wind less than 10 MPH

Time of day: From  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour before sunrise to 1 hour after sunrise.

Number and timing of surveys: Each area should be cruised in early April during the appropriate time of day to locate all booming grounds. Then, at least two (and preferably three, particularly if there is variation between the first two counts) complete counts of males on each booming ground must be obtained during the peak in booming ground activity (typically between April 10 and 25 in central Wisconsin). These individual counts should occur at least three days apart.

Size of area surveyed: The entire present day prairie chicken range should be surveyed each year. But more specifically, any area with suitable prairie chicken habitat that is to be subjected to management must be surveyed for the greater prairie chicken.

Method: Traverse entire area by vehicle, stopping at  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile intervals. Exit vehicle and listen for vocalization of booming male prairie chickens at each site for 2 minutes. Glass the area with binoculars to look for prairie chicken activity. Locate each booming ground on a map, and determine the number of males present. Compare number of males recorded at the same site in subsequent count(s), and assign a single count to each booming ground. Several vocalizations may be more easily heard than the actual booming, particularly when females are present on the ground.

## Definitions

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### **Definition of “Site” for greater prairie chicken:**

Because the greater prairie chicken is a lekking species and the large majority of nesting occurs within one mile of the lek, the “site” for this bird is described as the area within a one mile radius of an active lek. An active lek is one that has had bird activity within the previous two years (spring) as determined from the monitoring protocol.

An adequate amount of quality grassland habitat must be present within this area in order for prairie chickens to be active at the site.